

Last week's article started on Bentham's utilitarianism. As mentioned, utilitarianism is very much linked to pragmatism. Pragmatism says: something (whatever you're talking about) is right and good and true if "it works" or to state it equivalently, if "it's practical." But what does 'it works' or 'it's practical' mean? What is the criterion to decide if "something works" or is "practical?" To a large extent, it's utilitarianism – if it maximizes pleasure/satisfaction/good feeling in the here and now. Notice again that, like all of the isms, utilitarianism is: 1) intrinsically materialistic and thus atheistic, and 2) was not the result of some deep, world-wide contemplation of what's right and good and true – it was one man who arbitrarily declared it. Thus, as one walks unwittingly farther and farther down the steps of pragmatism or utilitarianism, they walk farther and farther towards atheism.

Let us also come back to: Everybody says so? No, not everybody says so. As per usual, as with all of the isms, one man, who is not God, arbitrarily declared it and then the pied pipers (marketing crew) picked it up to sell it, just like with the beanie babies. This is one of the main points we need to let settle in our minds in regard to the isms if this scourge upon mankind is to be defeated. At the heart of the issue is: what is true? What one man said or what God said? This is why we return frequently to the question of: Is Jesus God? Is Jesus God or the authors of the isms? We have to decide, we have to choose. The reason for talking about the isms is to bring the need for that choice out explicitly – otherwise we choose by just drifting in the direction of the isms because...it's what everybody knows.

Utilitarianism provides an especially useful example of how the marketing campaigns for the isms was carried out. At least one of the major forces promoting utilitarianism in our own time has been the entertainment industry. How many times have we been bombarded, for example, with illicit sexuality in the entertainment industry? Even when I was growing up, seemingly harmless TV shows frequently included the use of sexuality outside of marriage. Even if they weren't explicit, they showed 'respectable' characters (men detectives, for example), having women, who were not their wives, spending the night in their bed. Once that was acceptable, then it gradually ramped up. Notice that there were no explicit claims made here. Nobody said: here's utilitarianism, do you believe it, do you ascribe to it. No, they just show you how to live out utilitarianism, AND that it's ok, it's something good. It is all very subtle – and it's subtle for a reason. It's subtle because if the claim of utilitarianism was just made explicitly, too many people would have rejected it, at least initially. Of course, once the fish is on the hook, it's usually hard to get him off.

There have been popular expressions of utilitarianism that were even more direct than those implied in seemingly decent TV shows and movies. Have you heard the saying: "if it feels good, do it?" I seem to recall an advertisement using that phrase. When I did an internet search on that phrase, though, I didn't find the advertisement (although I didn't spend much time looking!). However, I did find out that there was a popular song by a Canadian rock band that used that phrase. It is pure utilitarianism – with a very effective strategy: a short phrase, set to music is not only easy to remember but if the melody is "catchy," it runs over and over again in your mind. According to several websites, a psychologist by the name of Timothy Leary actually coined the phrase. Yes, most people have been taught the isms without even realizing it – perhaps even many of the promoters. It's quite possible that the Canadian rock group were inadvertent promoters of utilitarianism, who themselves simply picked it up from the culture, the milieu of the times. As another example, how many times have you heard advertisements saying something like: "have it your way?" This is yet another example of conditioning people in pure utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is a focus on me and what I want with the added claim that it's not only ok to think, speak, and act in those terms but it's *good* to do so, you *should* do it.

Today, social media, of course, also helps to spread all of the isms. But this brings us to another question – how did these things begin to take hold, begin to get spread, in the 1800's and early 1900's without TV or internet? Well, people have always had sources of "entertainment," something other than work to occupy their time and minds with; things that determined culture. This was certainly true and well established in Europe in the 1800's. Even things like pamphlets or short stories or newspapers can contribute, as well as the entertainments common to that time period. But it should also be noted that the isms also took over universities. These isms

generally began there and were often spread there. And who goes to universities? Doctors, lawyers, scientists, entertainers, journalists, politicians – those who have a big influence on (and indeed form) popular thought.

Although the answer might be blatantly obvious to any serious Catholic, let us ask explicitly: is utilitarianism true, and in particular, is it consistent with Revelation – with what God has told us? To compare the two:

Utilitarianism: maximize *personal* pleasure/satisfaction/good feeling here and now; that's the purpose of life.

Our Lord: Blessed are: the poor, those who mourn, those insulted and persecuted for My sake.

Utilitarianism is a focus on *my own* satisfaction, the satisfaction of *my own* desires, in the here now. Our Lord says: happiness is forgetfulness of self, forgetfulness of one's own immediate (worldly) desires, and that real happiness is brought about by this willingness to sacrifice one's self (their own desires) for the sake of "the other" – God first and then other people. The Creator is telling us that this is the way we were made to be and unless we become that way, we will suffer – just like we suffer if the body is injured and not like it is meant to be. Recall that one way to characterize the effect of original sin is that now (after original sin) a person thinks first and foremost about themselves or consequences for themselves. Our Lord is telling us that is the way to doom; love is the way true happiness and that means sacrifice of one's self. Man has always had to struggle against the inclination to think of himself first – because of original sin; we're simply born that way. In days gone by, most people knew it was right to struggle against that inclination. With the advent of utilitarianism, man has chosen to throw that away. Utilitarianism is telling man: give up that struggle, it's silly; live for yourself because the whole purpose of life is to maximize *your* self-satisfaction in this life and this world. And why not, the only reality is material reality. While our Lord calls us to overcome the effect of original sin, utilitarianism exalts it, says it's good, says that fulfilling self-desire is the very purpose of life. Which do you believe? Who do you trust – our Lord or Jeremy Bentham? Which one is God? Is Jesus God or not? The answer is given not by a simple yes or no but by the way we live – how we think, speak, and act. The isms are anti-love, anti-Christ. Utilitarianism especially brings out this aspect of the isms. Which one will I abide with: our Lord or the isms? I have to consciously choose.

Let us not be too quick to say: I don't believe in utilitarianism, I'm not that way. I have to stop and ask myself, and really think about: how often and in how many ways do I think, speak, and act as if utilitarianism is true. How often do I think, speak, and act with my own interests, my own desires, being first & foremost? In contrast, how often do I really think of (say) the Beatitudes and say: I have to really live this way, be this way? Which one is really my habit, my habitual way of being. I know I can certainly say that all too often I've leaned more towards utilitarianism than towards our Lord, towards the Beatitudes. Consider the many small pleasures that occupy a person's mind from day to day, things that become habitual – for retired couples it might be coffee in the morning with friends; it might be camping or traveling or fishing or some form of entertainment or even work, and so many other things.

Now we do have to be a little careful – in two ways. One is to bear in mind that it's not wrong to have some enjoyable pastimes. The issue is: do I find myself living for those things? Is that where I believe happiness lies, is that where I place my most hope for happiness, which *can* creep in on a person more easily than we might realize. Do I value those more than, say, getting to Mass as often as I can especially on weekdays, learning more and more about the faith, a visit to the Blessed Sacrament? Which is the real highlight of the day for me? A second precaution is that as I really begin to sacrifice myself and live for the Lord, it will actually start to breed happiness within me. My favorite part of the day, for example, might be getting to weekday Mass or spending an hour with our Lord. That's not utilitarianism. Although you derive happiness from it, it is because you are living for "the other" – in this example, for our Lord. Maybe a wife and mother doesn't really like to cook but does enjoy doing it for the sake of her family. Again, that's not utilitarianism, it's living for / loving the other.

We will round pragmatism next time with a little discussion on consequentialism and then bring out some of the other isms.

*God bless you, Fr Kuhn.*